

Washington, D.C. Yesterday, Congressman Sanford D. Bishop, Jr., Representative of Georgia's Second Congressional District, signed onto a bill sponsored by Rep. Stephanie Herseth (D-SD) prohibiting the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture from closing or relocating any Farm Service Agency (FSA) county or field office until at least one year after enactment of the next Farm bill. Congressman Bishop also has sent several letters to FSA Administrator Teresa Lasseter urging the agency to review their closing and consolidation plan.

In his most recent letter, dated April 19, 2007, Congressman Bishop wrote, "I understand that our state FSA committee determined that they should use three factors in the closure/consolidation decision-making process—shared management, proximity to another FSA office, and low workload and/or minimal staffing. I am concerned that other factors such as office efficiency, the number of farmers served, and the dollar amount of FSA payments processed in the respective FSA county office were not taken into account."

Meanwhile, the allocation of funds and change in policy expected in the next Farm bill will alter the amount of work done by each FSA office. Therefore, only after the new legislation is passed and new workloads are determined could the FSA determine which offices are most efficient and which should be closed.

"FSA offices are critical resources for farmers in Georgia," Bishop said. "It is important that the FSA use the most precise calculations and have the most up-to-date information in the closing of any office."

The House Agriculture Committee is expected to take up the Farm bill next month.